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FUTURE TRENDS IN PRODUCTIVITY AND WELL-BEING INTERVENTIONS: COULD THEY WORK?

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Statement of problem: Within the field of primary interventions the ongoing discussion relates to what actually works in interventions. There have been results that point to the importance of process evaluation as a supplement to outcome evaluation (Cox, Karanika, Griffiths, & Houdmont, 2007; Semmer, 2006), others have pointed to the importance of employee participation (Nielsen, Randall, Holten, & Gonzalez, 2010) as well as management support (Ipsen, Gish, & Poulsen, 2014) just to mention a few areas within the discussion of what works. A majority of the reported intervention studies primarily targets employee well-being. In order to create sustainable interventions, there seems to be growing evidence that well-being interventions also should be linked to the performance goals of the managers (Ipsen et al., 2014) and furthermore that interventions should be incorporated into the daily business of the organizations. As a consequence of this development some interventions now target both employee well-being and productivity within the same intervention (Ipsen & Andersen, 2013). The ongoing discussions about new perspectives in interventions leave us with a question of what are the new trends in productivity and well-being interventions.

Procedures: Forty researchers and practitioners within the field of human factors and interventions were gathered at a workshop called “Designing work systems for productivity and well-being” with the aim of sharing experiences and discussing future trends within this field of interventions. The discussion took place at the Organizational Design and Management Conference 2014 in Copenhagen. The participants were from countries such as; New Zealand, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Finland, Belgium, and USA. The participants were at the beginning of the workshop asked to write one answer to the question: “What makes an improvement process work” on a post-it note. We chose to ask about improvement processes because we wanted to emphasize the productivity angle. Subsequently all participants shortly presented their answer and the post-it notes were put on a Fishbone-chart. The answers clustered themselves around different themes: collaboration/participation, competencies, feedback, process support, regulation, trust/commitment, measure of productivity, economy, and goal and strategy. From the different themes four was selected: 1. Trust and Commitment, 2. Process Support, 3. Goal and Strategy, and 4. Participation and Collaboration. The large clusters were selected. The participants then in groups of 7-12 discussed experiences with respect to one of the themes and pointed towards new trends and research questions. Their discussions were documented on a poster and after 20 minutes the participants were asked to move to a new theme, where they would be presented with the findings from the first round of discussion. The new coming participants then had time to reflect on the findings and make further suggestions. The result of the workshop was four posters pointing at future trends and research ideas within the field of productivity and well-being interventions.

Results and analysis: The results from the theme “Trust and Commitment” pointed towards communication, that it builds upon shared values of the organization, that lack of resources can be inhibiting for building trust and creating commitment, and that in order to create trust and commitment you need to address the organizational culture. One of the key research questions developed within this theme is “How much competitive advantage can be gained by having trust and commitment in an organization?”. The theme “Process Support” resulted in the following; process support should include mentoring of managers, it should ensure quality of intervention plans, and it is difficult to know exactly what creates good process evaluation due to the lack of honest measurements before and after the intervention. The group pointed to this research question: “What elements in process support are facilitating change processes and how?”.

The “Goal and Strategy” theme found that interventions should be linked to the business strategy, the goals should be clear and that there seems to lack a tool to measure the extent to which a goal is fulfilled. A key research question for the group was “How can intervention goals fit the company’s capability?”.

The last of the themes, “Participation and Collaboration”, suggested to learn from other research fields and furthermore discussed whether all employees should participate or if it was sufficient to include some employees, and finally that perception of participation is relative. A research question from this theme is: “What can we learn from other fields (engineering, change management, etc.), when we are designing interventions?”.

The results show that a systems perspective is needed in order to embrace the different perspectives from the workshop.

Conclusions: We can see that the future trends within sustainable organizational interventions develop towards a more business oriented approach, where the interventions should be closely linked to organizational structures, culture and strategy.

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